

REPORT TO THE 43RD DISTRICT



STATE REP. FRANK CHOPP

SPRING 2004

Dear Friends & Neighbors,

I am happy to report that the 2004 legislative session was productive.

This year we were able to focus on building a better economy for all people in our state. As you will see in this report, we did that by investing in education, helping create good jobs with benefits, and making health care more affordable.

I am proud of our accomplishments - they will make real differences in the lives of real people. And I believe they represent the values we here in the 43rd district all share: compassion, fairness, opportunity, and leadership.

Thank you for allowing me the honor of serving you in the House of Representatives. I appreciate your support more than I can say.

Sincerely,

Frank Chopp

Frank Chopp

INVESTING IN EDUCATION

A quality education is achieved with motivated, well-trained teachers and students who are healthy and ready to learn. While citizen efforts are underway for a big investment for early childhood, K-12, and higher education, the legislature made progress in those areas this year. In the 2004 session, we passed:

- SB 6211 to make revisions to the levy base calculations. For the Seattle School district this will result in more than \$12 million new dollars over the next three years.
- HB 2195 to reform academic standards by making state graduation requirements (WASL) clear and focused, and by providing students additional opportunities to succeed and stay on track for graduation.
- SB 5877 to reform the Learning Assistance Program by directing more funds to schools that need help making sure all kids achieve Washington's high academic standards.
- \$28 million to provide healthcare for our teachers and classified staff. The budget passed by the legislature holds the line on health care costs for our school employees – investing many more million dollars to keep the out-of-pocket health care expenses as low as possible.



Though much was accomplished, much more needs to be done for the education of our kids.

We were again disappointed the Republican-controlled Senate did not pass HJR 4204, allowing voters to decide if school levies should pass with a simple majority, as opposed to the current 60 percent vote. We must make this happen in the future in order to give our schools the support they need.

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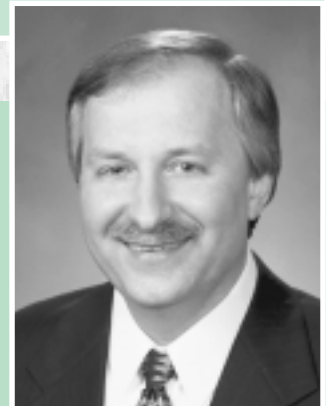
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GOOD PAYING JOBS WITH BENEFITS

This session was a combination of both helping and protecting the working men and women of Washington.

- HB 1777 provided better wages, health care benefits, and workers' compensation benefits for home care workers. This is on top of the 75 cent/hour raise given by the legislature last year and enacts the contract allowed by voters with the passage of Initiative 775.
- \$17.5 million in funding for more enrollments in colleges and universities to train students for good paying jobs.
- Numerous bills were passed to improve the ability of Washington to keep existing jobs and create new jobs across the state.
- HB 2439 increased the number of apprentice programs in state public works projects – one of the best ways to train people for good paying jobs in the building trades, but this was stopped by the Senate.
- HCR 4419 took the first step to make sure state tax dollars are not sending Washington jobs overseas, but was also stopped by the Senate.
- We protected the minimum wage and worker compensation benefits. The Republican-controlled Senate passed legislation to roll back the minimum wage and reduce benefits for workers injured on the job. House Democrats turned back these attacks on working people.

WASHINGTON C.A.R.E.S – PROVIDING FOR BASIC NEEDS OF PEOPLE

House Democrats formed the Washington CARES Task Force (Compassion, Accountability, Reform, Economic Security) to address the most basic needs of children, working families, people with disabilities and seniors.

The CARES Task Force was very successful and resulted in:

- Protection of health care for low-income children.
- Restoration of budget cuts to hospitals, clinics and mental health services.
- Increased funding for:
 - Care for foster kids.
 - Legal services for the poor.
 - Support for homeless families.
 - Services for victims of domestic violence.
 - Help for the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Passage of the Act for Hungry Families which will increase the ability for thousands of families to get food stamps and extend the school lunch program.
- Stopping the devastating cuts proposed by the Republican-controlled Senate to the General Assistance Unemployable (GA-U program) – a last-resort lifeline for people with disabilities who are unable to work.



MAKING HEALTH CARE MORE AFFORDABLE



To help every student in school, we must set the goal of ensuring that every child has health care coverage by 2008, the same year high school students will start being required to pass the WASL test to graduate. We took the first step this session by:

- Eliminating Medicaid premiums for health insurance for children in families at or below 150% of poverty and reducing premiums for other low-income children.
- Adding funding to community clinics and restoring funding for hospital care for those who don't have health insurance.

In addition, the House passed other health care legislation that was stopped by the Republican-controlled Senate:

- HB 1828, mental health parity, requiring insurance plans to cover mental health as they do other medical and surgical needs.
- HB 2469, allowing individuals to buy prescription drugs from Canada. People in Washington pay two to three times more for the same drugs purchased here in the States.



MEDICAL MALPRACTICE/ LIABILITY REFORM



House Democrats passed a comprehensive package of patient safety, malpractice insurance, and civil liability reforms. If the Senate had passed our proposal, it would have improved patient safety, assured that physicians and hospitals can get the insurance coverage they need and stabilize their rates, and reformed our civil justice system while protecting our constitutional rights.

Senate Republican budget writers even refused House proposed increases in reimbursement rates for emergency room doctors and OB/GYNs – two of the specialty areas hardest hit by insurance costs. Instead, they insisted on caps on compensation for pain and suffering (which hasn't worked in other states) – a proposal that takes away the right of a victim to receive damages and lets the insurance companies increase prices as they see fit.

It is very disappointing that Senate Republicans turned their backs on real solutions to offset real costs for doctors in our state. We will continue to work in good faith on these and other ideas to address this issue.

There was progress in other areas of liability concerns. The legislature passed SB 5536, addressing liability concerns of construction defects in condominiums, and SB 5869, setting up a self-insurance risk pool for non-profit agencies, which will save millions and millions of dollars in insurance payments for charities across the state.

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CIVIL RIGHTS

Once again, the House passed HB 1809, making it illegal to discriminate in employment, banking and real estate, on the basis of sexual orientation. In a troubling move, the Republican-controlled Senate shut down rather than take a vote on this basic piece of common sense and fairness legislation.

PROTECTING & SUSTAINING THE ENVIRONMENT



The legislature passed:

- Controls on toxic chemicals by funding the PBT (persistent biochemical toxins) program to identify chemicals (like mercury) for reduction and elimination.
- The “no oil spills” bill (HB 3020) directing the creation of a zero-spill strategy.
- The “e-waste” bill (HB 2488) to finance and implement recycling of electronic hardware waste.
- Mitigation of carbon dioxide pollution (HB 3141) to help address global warming.
- Funding for outdoor recreation (HB 2489) that emphasizes non-motorized recreation.
- Maintenance of passenger-only ferries and increases in commute-trip reduction programs.

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